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KEEPING THE FAMILY HAPPY

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U. S. Department of Agriculture

A radio talk by Miss Lita Bane, Collaborator in Parent Education, U. S. Department of Agriculture, delivered in the Home Demonstration Radio Hour, October 2, 1935, and broadcast by a network of 47 associate-NBC radio stations.

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What an elusive thing happiness is! With meanings as various as the people in search of it! It seems to consist in part of a steady on-going stream of contentment and in part of bright flashes of exhilaration. Neither of these is likely to be ever-present, but maybe we can have more of them without expecting to banish every unhappy moment.

Whose job is it? The right answer is: "It's the job of every member of the family." But we all know that most of it falls on Mother's shoulders -- unfair as it may be. In most cases no one's moods are so quickly reflected in family life as Mother's. If she shows hurt feelings, is cross and disgruntled, or even ill, a thick gloom is likely to settle heavily down upon the household that the combined efforts of other family members cannot lift.

It is she too who is likely to keep the ball of happiness rolling. So first of all she needs to be well. So do all the members of the family, for that matter, but it is of supreme importance that Mother be well. One can sometimes rise above his aches and pains, but it's a lot easier to rise if one has no aches and pains.

If the family is to be happy, the home must furnish most of the things needed for their happiness. It goes without saying that it must furnish good food and plenty of it, good places to rest, privacy for young and old, and opportunities and equipment for recreation. Most important of all, there must be a chance to build up and enjoy family affection, without which even the most hardy soul cannot achieve much in the way of real contentment. That calls for a nice consideration of one another's tastes, a fine tolerance of weaknesses and foibles, and a generous appreciation of good points. All this leads to family loyalty. One has to be careful about overdoing family loyalty, however, lest it become belligerent and disagreeable. Room has to be left for loyalty to friends and interests outside the home.

We all need people deeply interested in our welfare, ready and eager to be proud of us, to comfort and encourage us. This the family can offer toward our happiness.

Can these things be planned for and improved or do they just happen? I believe they can be accomplished more easily by a little planning if it is not done too self-consciously and the plans are not imposed too rigidly upon the family by one person. Study the family when you know it is really happy and see if you can tell just why. Then try to repeat some of the circumstances in a little different form.

The quick thunderstorms of family dissension aren't serious unless

they become chronic. They are to be expected where people of varying age and disposition live together so intimately and must share so many things in common. Ruffled feelings, sharp words, sudden outbursts, -- and the air may be cleared. Such storms should be forgotten. They must not be allowed to leave any undercurrent of illwill. Sometimes we take family ructions too seriously, brood over them, and allow them to darken the family's happiness.

You might like to know what some young people think happy homes should have. Two hundred college students listed the following:

1. Little tension in the home
2. Much family affection.
3. Much entertaining of friends or relatives in the home.
4. Much entertaining of children's friends in the home.
5. Husband and wife often attend social functions together.

It is exciting to make your own list and then see whether your home is measuring up. Some years ago I tried my hand at it, and the result was that I wanted a home that was the place of abode of persons bound together by ties of affection, a place where affection of parents for one another, for their children, and among all members of the family is nurtured and enjoyed, where the immature are protected and guarded, a place where one may have rest and privacy, where one may keep his treasures, where one may satisfy his individual tastes, where fundamental culture consisting of customs, language, courtesies, and traditions, is conserved and passed on to the young, a place where altruism and other worthy character traits are generated and cultivated; a haven, a sanctuary, a source of inspiration, and a place where one may enjoy his individual kind of recreation and share it with others.

Here's wishing you luck in keeping your family happy.